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THE VIENNA EXHIBITION IN CONNEXION WITH ART-INDUSTRY.

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III. DAMASK LINENS, LACE CURTAINS AND LACE.

In our preceding article on those branches of textile fabrics, the object of which is the decoration of the house and dwelling-room, we have seen the movement of an æsthetic reform which has already effected an almost entire transformation in carpetry. It is not so in the case of such woven stuffs as damask linens, tablecloths, napkins and towels, though it is the possession of an abundant supply of these articles which makes the pride of the housewife. But what she especially values is the pure cool linen, the solid material, which she can hand down as an heirloom to her daughter, while its design or other ornament is comparatively a matter of indifference.

The natural consequence of this is that any change or improvement on its ornamentation is very slow in gaining ground. If the designs of the flowers, plants, wreaths, or anything of similar character, are in one style or another, the common eye does not see it, since the effect of white upon white is almost impalpable to the sense. Still some attempts have been made in this direction, but only just attempts. They enter however into so many different places that they are a sign of the times, the sign of an irrepressible impulse towards change.

The countries which have exhibited such damask linens as have any interest for us here, i. e., from the artistic point of view, are England, France, Austria and Germany, to which we must add Russia. The English

exhibition is very defective in this department, and affords no proper idea of the prevailing tendency of ornamentation. There is scarcely anything beyond a few table covers with white patterns on a pale yellow ground, with escutcheons, plants, animals and unmeaning designs in none of which is there any distinct character to be remarked. We know however that precisely in the matter of tablecloths and covers, manifold artistic efforts have been made in England, especially in conventionalised patterns, but we cannot say that the objects she exhibits afford any evidence of it.

The general style of ornament in these stuffs has hitherto consisted in a regularly repeated pattern of spots, points, stars and the like, together with a border; or in flowers, plants, or wreaths, as naturalistically represented as the poverty of the artistic expedients in this branch of industry permits. Those who have thought of producing anything beyond this, particularly for exhibitions, have introduced figures, and in order to make them more apparent have shown them white on a grey ground. Such works are still very numerous in the exhibition, especially in the French, Austrian and German departments. They mark the highest point that has been reached in this branch of Art-Industry, and are of admirable merit when we take into consideration the great technical difficulties that are to be surmounted. The most important specimen is the *Haidenröslein*, after Kaulbach, from the Austrian manufactory of Regenhart and Raymann. But to what use can it be put? If used as a tablecloth, the artistic and laborious workmanship is concealed beneath plates and dishes: if framed as a decoration for the wall, it is surpassed by photographs

* See page 132 *ante*.
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and engravings. The French works of this class, those of Casse and Son in Lille for example, are thus self condemned as in direct opposition to their destination, a wonderful proof of want of taste.

The attempts at improvement at which we have glanced, take two directions; in the one, the plan is to leave the entire ornamentation in this branch of industry just as it is, with regard to its style, that is simply white upon white. In this case it is sought to improve the ornamentation partly by a better arrangement corresponding with its destination, partly by clearer, more beautiful conventional designs, partly by a more artistic combination of figures, which may satisfy an educated eye and an enlightened judgement. In this direction two Saxon manufactories are especially distinguished, those of Joseph Meyer and Prölss and Sons in Dresden and Grossschönau. There can be no question that the direction is a right one: the improvement of the ornamentation, the artistic arrangement according to given conditions, are requirements of course, and so far the efforts of the above named manufactories must be acknowledged. But there is a possibility of having too much of a good thing. When, for example, the Prölss factory produces a tablecloth ornamented with mythological scenes and figures, such as the Rape of Proserpine and other smaller subjects from the compositions of the historical painter Sachse, however happy it may be in arrangement, in this case moreover, more appropriate to a ceiling, however artistic the composition, it is after all only a tablecloth, must be used as such and yet tries to compete with a picture. Herein lies the error: to mistake painting for decoration. Assuredly these works are in no degree decorative, and decoration is the grand desideratum in Art-Industry.

The second kind of attempt at improvement sets before itself a different, and this time a purely decorative purpose, namely the introduction of colour into linen. It has to encounter, for the present, the general opposition of housewives, but this must yield here also, as it has done in regard to light and dark colours on the walls of rooms. The beginning must only be modestly made with coloured borders or stripes, and no colour whatever is needed in the ground. The first attempts in this direction were made many years ago in France, and we find them now again in tablecloths, handkerchiefs, napkins, with different and by no means happily designed borders in red, violet, yellow and blue. After these we must notice similar Russian productions (by Grisenko of Petersburg) having patterns on them in red, taken from the lace work of their national domestic industry, an application of it which is quite suitable and happy, and deserves to be imitated. Augustus Küfferle, of Vienna, with the assistance of designs by Storck, attempted two years ago to make a large tablecloth for the imperial table, with a broad red border, but the difficulty was to carry the pattern equally round the corners. This difficulty seems to have been conquered on a table-cover with a blue border from the above named manufactory of Joseph Meyer, the workmanship of which has a very happy effect. Another novelty is also exhibited by Küf-

ferle in his curtains and hangings in damask linen with regular patterns and broad borders in different colours, due also to the idea and designs of Storck. They have the effect of silk, are excellent as to decoration and comparatively cheap, so that they are a real godsend for an ordinary house. All that remains to be desired is that the manufacturers should not rest contented with these isolated attempts, but throw such stuffs into the market in the largest abundance.

In ornamental lace or net curtains there are also some novelties which have the appearance not merely of simple variations of fashion but are attempts to remedy certain felt deficiencies and incongruities. The countries which are the most distinguished for this branch of industry are England, France, Belgium, Switzerland; and next to them Austria and Germany. The general object of these curtains is to diminish the light from the windows and to soften the transition from the brightness of the glass to the darker walls. Where however the rooms are situated in narrow streets with tall houses, the light is generally needed, and in this case the curtains are made light and transparent so as to impede the light as little as possible while they serve the above named purpose. Where much light is not required these light curtains are partly covered by darker ones, as in England and France, and thus they play but a secondary part; in German houses of an ordinary description this is seldom the case.

Manual and machine labour, the latter of which has given an especial expansion to this branch of industry from its ornamental side, have vied with one another in the development of an exceeding richness of decoration. We remember how, in the former exhibitions, whole landscapes and gardens with temples and other buildings and figures, and with magnificent tropical plants, covered the entire surface of curtains, just like pictures, except that they were white upon white. Now when these curtains are hung in folds, as in Germany, or, as in England, concealed for the most part underneath heavy and dark hangings, their whole beauty is lost. From this external reason, æsthetics being out of the question, this kind of decoration must prove itself incongruous, and we see that it is therefore banished equally from Switzerland and England, as well as Belgium and Austria, the only reminiscences of it being seen in large bushes with elongated leaves, which have the appearance of studies of foregrounds. The naturalistic is still predominant in this case, yet still there is a tendency, irregular and arbitrary in detail, to a certain regularity of repetition. This is the case, for example, in the works of Simon May, and Jacoby and Co. of Nottingham; a purely regular and simple pattern like one in the exhibition from Copestake, Moore and Crampton (Nottingham) is a great rarity. The Swiss stand in the same fluctuating position, affecting still more than the English the great landscape style, while one German Manufactory (Weiss in Ravensburg) has exhibited a specimen of this antiquated garden and temple style. It is quite different indeed when the Swiss, like Zellweger in Trogen, and

Steiger in Herisau, endeavour to represent large leaves and flowers in absolute relief: this is entirely opposed to the peculiarity of the material, the great characteristic of which is lightness and transparency. On the other hand, the Swiss display, amid the multitude of their productions, several really pretty conventionalised patterns, and it is interesting to notice that these have all proceeded from one school, the school of design of the commercial directory in St. Gallen. Wherever indeed art holds its sway the plant representations are not naturalistic but conventionalised. Among the Austrian manufacturers Faber and Dambock are preeminent, both exhibit a whole series of conventionalised patterns, but do not adhere to them exclusively.

But it is the French especially to whom we are indebted for the greatest novelties in this branch of industry. As they usually hang one lace curtain only, and generally without any folds before their window, they can well display a richer pattern. Hence we notice, for example, from Meunier and Son, a whole series of such curtains, with figures after the style of Watteau's pictures, Genii, Balletdancers, Muses, Goddesses such as Diana, Venus &c., surrounded by free ornaments and borders. These figures are of course made by hand, are on the whole well designed, but when closely seen, have but a rough appearance. But the French manufacturers have not stopped here. The want of colour has been felt here also, and they have executed such figures in red or black threads just like a coloured chalk drawing, nay, they have gone even further than this, representing bodies and drapery by the application of coloured material, and inserted contours and shadows with needlework. It is very doubtful whether this sort of thing, which is already some years old, will keep its place or become general. The impression it creates is not very favorable. Where, as is the case in Germany, the curtains fall in folds from both sides of the window, these productions with scenes and figures upon them are quite out of place.

Still fewer are the novelties in the branch of lace properly so called and this from the nature of the case. The design is impeded by the difficulties and trammels of manufacture. The designer has no freedom of will with respect to it but must adapt himself to it. He must also have some acquaintance with the art of lace making, so that the Austrian lace manufacturers of the Bohemian highlands, on their attempts to improve this branch of industry are obliged to get the better designs executed by Parisian artists. From this dependence in Paris results every where a similarity of ornamentation. The same result is a consequence of the continued imitation of the old Brabant lace, of the eighteenth century, whose very bad and confused designs are generally adhered to. If we only observe what is exhibited in the English

department as well as in the Belgian and French, of imitation of Valenciennes and Malines, we shall easily persuade ourselves of the worthlessness of these objects in respect to design. The old patterns have at least, besides their extraordinary delicacy, the flexibility and at the same time the strength and solidity which the touch so soon discovers.

The special modern works in black as well as white, such as shawls, mantilles, trimmings, coverings &c., which in a certain sense are most admirable productions of human skill and industry, all follow one and the same genuine French mode of decoration, whether exhibited by Belgium, France, Austria or Saxony. Of Spanish lace there is too little to enable us to form any judgement. There is a wholesale show of it with flourishing lines and borders, filled up with little delicate plants, flowers, tendrils and grasses in bunches, or scattered loosely, sometimes crowded together and sometimes distant, allowing more of the ground to be visible. This is a kind of decoration which is quite in harmony with the delicacy of the material, but there is danger, which is often perceptible, of a want of clearness and repose accruing and making the design confused. The delicacy of the detail is here more pleasing than the general effect with the coloured groundwork of the silk dresses, as was the case with the lace of the seventeenth century, in which the clear and transparent part was separated from the closer work by broader masses and more beautiful lines.

These older laces and their technique still survive in the Irish guipures, the exhibition of which is by no means unimportant, but they are rather small specimens.

If we go back still further to the old Venetian laces of the seventeenth century with their beautiful and regular patterns, we find them now only imitated in the kind of lace which is at present in fashion as trimming. And there are many of our ladies who prefer the imitation of the old lace, of which there are very successful specimens in the exhibition of the Austrian ladies' work, those, for example of Countess Alberti. The peasant work also, especially of the Swedes, shows a sympathy for the oldest sort of lace and a skill which they learnt centuries ago from the nuns, and which they have always preserved. Lace work is to be seen everywhere in national domestic industry for the most part good, though simple in its motives. The same healthy traditional sense is here preserved as in the coloured embroideries, which, as to their taste in colour put to shame our domestic ladies' works. This is what again stands forth prominently in the present exhibition, that ladies' works of the present day are weak in colour, but show some progress in white embroideries and different kinds of lace work.

(To be continued in our next.)